

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK PLAN**  
**ZONING WORKING GROUP: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**1. KEY ISSUES RAISED IN THE CONSULTATION**

**A wide range of comments were made regarding the concept and implementation of the Zoning spatial strategy approach and are grouped under a number of broad headings. The National Park Authority summary of the comments made is set out below:**

**a. Appropriateness of the concept of zoning in the New Forest**

This was a fundamental area of concern querying whether zoning was appropriate for the New Forest for a number of reasons:

- Implicit hierarchy conveys a sense of priority or level of importance of the 3 areas
- Appreciate that zones 1 and 2 need special protection but zone 3 also merits protection
- Need to treat the National Park as a whole
- Zoning policy will cause fragmentation of the area
- Need to consider proposals on their individual merits
- It will make it more difficult to enjoy the National Park
- zoning is predicated on the false assumption that recreational activities are the major cause of damage to fragile / important habitats
- The forest is not in danger of being overused or damaged
- There is no need for a zoning policy
- Proposals are unworkable
- The whole of the National Park is at maximum use already

However there was also recognition that certain parts of the New Forest are more sensitive than others, but that the concept could be refined in a number of ways, for instance by taking account of the sensitivity / risk to the historic environment.

**b. The relocation of facilities and services**

This was a major area of concern focusing on the practicality of relocating facilities and services and comprised the following comments:

- concern over how the relocation of facilities and activities will work, and implications on homes, businesses, traffic etc
- Concern over the cost of relocating facilities and activities
- Query whether compulsory purchase will be used
- Relocation of recreation into Zone 3 in the name of tranquillity is misconceived
- Zoning will impact on the economic viability through relocation and restrictions

However there was support for relocation of damaging activities where it can be done in a socially and economically acceptable way.

**c. Identification of the three zones**

A number of comments were made with regard to the areas covered by the three different zones, specifically that:

- Not all areas within any one zone are the same or should be treated the same
- The zones ignore the differences in geology, topography and usage across the whole of National Park /
- The zones don't address what's appropriate in different areas
- Zone 2 contains other honeypot facilities eg Buckler's Hard which will cease to be tranquil in summer
- Zone 1 should not include inclosures, as they are not robust areas
- All Zone 1 should be classed as fragile
- consideration should be given to a fourth zone in more robust areas
- Zones have an arbitrary boundary

**d. Resulting pressures in some areas**

A key area of concern related to the implementation of the zoning approach and the resulting pressures on some areas:

- Zone 3 already bears the brunt of visitors to the detriment of the local environment - channelling visitors away from Zone 1 puts more pressure on Zone 3
- Need to create new publicly accessible areas in more robust areas
- Zone 3 is largely farmland so how can this absorb a greater range of new activity
- Concerns over restrictions on activities currently allowed in Zones 1 and 2
- concerns that certain areas will eventually become unavailable to the public
- want unrestricted access
- object to Zone 3 becoming a dumping ground for activities and facilities deemed unsuitable for zones 1 and 2
- designated sites should be protected by a buffer zone
- need to be flexible with the zoning policy as population and visitor numbers increase
- will result in overcrowding / overuse of certain areas

**e. Relationship of the zoning concept with other objectives / policies**

Some comments were made regarding how the Zoning approach fits with some of the other objectives and policies in the National Park Plan, specifically that:

- it conflicts with the desire to reduce vehicle movements and increase visitor numbers – especially as zone 3 is the smallest, is mostly private land with relatively few footpaths and bridleways
- a flexible approach is needed which takes account of the Park's second purpose
- it conflicts with service villages which are in zone 1 yet are also the focus for development
- the approach should be carried through into other policies
- Zone 3 is still important for commoning / back up grazing
- Nature conservation importance in zone 3 may be undermined

## f. Lack of details of the zoning approach

Several comments were raised about the lack of detail in the National Park Plan, specifically that:

- The Zoning proposals not being carried through to other Park Plan policies
- The zoning concept is too simplistic
- The Proposal is too vague
- More detail needed on the map of zones
- Needs better explanation
- More evidence required to underpin the approach

Although many respondents supported the principle of zoning, this was often qualified by the need for more detail on the implementation of the proposal.

## 2. RELEVANT POLICIES IN THE CONSULTATION DRAFT NATIONAL PARK PLAN

### List of policies and text taken from the draft Plan

The concept of zoning of development is set out in Chapter 3 of the New Forest National Park Plan as part of the Strategic Policy Approach. Three broad geographical zones covering the whole of the National Park have been identified based on the sensitivity of areas and level of risk to the natural environment from activity generating development and outdoor recreation.

Central to this Plan, and reflected in the zoning approach, is the conservation and enhancement of the Special Qualities of the National Park (NPP Pg 30)

Zone 1	
<p><b>Character</b></p> <p>Zone 1 is characterised by the key designations of the New Forest SSSI, SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites, together with the majority of the most tranquil areas of the National Park. Generally this zone includes the Open Forest and Crown Lands.</p> <p>It is for the most part highly sensitive and includes some particularly fragile and important semi-natural habitats; but there are also a number of more robust areas within this zone, for example some of the forestry Inclosures.</p>	<p><b>Policy approach</b></p> <p>The policy approach will be to avoid increasing overall activity levels by preventing major new development including outdoor recreation facilities.</p> <p>Opportunities will be sought to relocate any facilities and activities where these cause direct damage to protected habitats or features or undermine the most tranquil areas.</p> <p>Relocation will preferentially be to suitable locations within Zone 3, except where they meet an essential need within Zone 1, in which case sites will be sought in the more robust areas of this zone.</p>

<b>Zone 2</b>	
<p><b>Character</b></p> <p>Zone 2 is characterised by the designated coastal habitats including the Beaulieu river estuary, and the coastal hinterland between the coast and public lanes running east-west from Lymington to Calshot. Some of the most tranquil areas of the National Park are also found in this zone.</p> <p>It is for the most part highly sensitive and includes some particularly fragile and important semi-natural habitats. Lepe and Calshot, where there are existing recreational facilities, are more robust areas within this zone.</p>	<p><b>Policy approach</b></p> <p>The policy approach for Zone 2 will be to avoid increasing activity levels through development or new outdoor recreation facilities, other than around the existing facilities at Lepe Country Park and Calshot where there is greater flexibility to absorb recreational activity than elsewhere on the coast.</p>
<b>Zone 3</b>	
<p><b>Character</b></p> <p>Zone 3 is characterised by enclosed fields, woodlands and farmland. These range from large estates to small holdings.</p> <p>It includes important National Park landscapes and some extensive Conservation Areas designated for their important cultural and built heritage, but is for the most part more robust than Zones 1 and 2. There are also a number of small sensitive sites including some designated for their natural or cultural value.</p>	<p><b>Policy approach</b></p> <p>With careful location there is flexibility within this zone to absorb a greater range of new activity than elsewhere in the National Park, including relocation from elsewhere in the Park, particularly where this will provide local economic benefits to underpin sustainable land management.</p>

### **Objective U3**

#### **Manage the impacts of recreation on the environment and communities of the National Park**

The management of recreation has been a major issue in the New Forest for more than 50 years. The present system of car parks and campsites on the Crown Lands was developed in the 1960s and 1970s in response to a growing awareness of the international nature conservation importance of the area, concerns about loss of tranquillity and the widespread physical damage caused by unrestricted access to the Forest by vehicles and campers.

However there are still widespread concerns and perceptions locally about the effects of visitor pressure on the fabric of the New Forest, its wildlife, sense of remoteness and on the day to day lives of residents. The area receives more than 13 million visitor days each year and it is estimated that this will increase by about 12% (or an additional 1.6 million visits each year) by 2026, due to increases in population in the surrounding areas.

The impacts of recreation are difficult to evaluate, but there is growing evidence indicating that levels of disturbance do have adverse effects on at least some species of ground nesting birds. A number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments are at risk primarily or partly due to damage by recreation and physical erosion, especially immediately around popular locations, is clear from aerial photographs.

Even more difficult to quantify are the effects on tranquillity, but there is no doubt that large group activities in the more remote areas do have a visual and, sometimes, a noise impact.

Recreational impacts are largely due to the concentration and frequency of visits, rather than by the activities in themselves, which are generally quiet recreational pursuits like walking, dog walking, cycling and riding. Currently a large proportion of visits are made to the most sensitive locations and protected habitats of the Open Forest, the Crown Lands and the coast, including some of the most tranquil and remote areas of the National Park.

These areas will continue to provide the essential New Forest experience that many people come to enjoy. Nevertheless the designation of the National Park does give the opportunity to review the management of recreation across the whole area, address the demand on the most sensitive parts of the Forest and improve access and enjoyment in more robust and sustainable locations.

The approach will be to:

**Adopt a broad zoning approach which guides the level of recreational activity and provision of facilities in different geographical areas, based on the sensitivity or relative robustness of different landscapes and habitats.**

Very broadly, the most sensitive areas include the nationally and internationally designated habitats, the most tranquil areas of the National Park and the coast and its hinterland. The more robust locations include a variety of enclosed landscapes.

Some discreet areas which are more robust lie within the most sensitive areas (such as Inclosure woodlands) and vice versa. For more detail on the character and general policies for different zones see the strategic policy approach, Chapter 3.

### **Policy UP3.2**

**Provide additional, improved or relocated facilities and infrastructure for outdoor recreation appropriate to the National Park in more robust areas within the Park and**

**Avoid any increase in overall activity levels and the provision of recreational facilities and infrastructure within the most sensitive and fragile landscapes and habitats, seeking opportunities to relocate existing facilities where these are damaging or undermining the Special Qualities**

Any new or relocated facilities should be carefully sited and designed following a full evaluation of environmental impacts, including impacts on European Sites for nature conservation. Sites close to main transport routes will be preferred.

### **Alternative Policy Approach (Annex 1 of National Park Plan):**

UP3.2: An alternative to the Authority's proposed approach of supporting recreational facilities in more robust locations (while avoiding any increase in the most sensitive landscapes) would be to support additional, improved or relocated facilities and infrastructure for outdoor recreation throughout the National Park. (National Park Plan Pg 139)

## **Links to the New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy**

The Recreation Management Strategy uses the same three geographical zones for the purposes of considering outdoor recreation and the sensitivity and capacity of the natural environment to accommodate recreational activity. This is developed in several detailed policies, with a focus on taking pressure off the Open Forest (Zone 1).

## **ANNEX 1: EXISTING PLANNING POLICIES RELEVANT TO THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK**

The New Forest National Park was designated in 2005 and has a population of 34,677 people. The National Park is covered by three existing Locals Plans (New Forest District, Salisbury District and Test Valley Borough), two Structure Plans (Hampshire and Wiltshire) and includes land within the South East and South West regions. For regional planning purposes, the New Forest National Park is deemed to lie within the South East region, and therefore the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East is the relevant Plan.

### **National planning policy guidance**

#### **PPG17, Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation**

PPG17 confirms that the designation of areas as National Parks does not preclude the use of land for sporting and recreational purposes, but intrusive activities should be restricted (paragraph 27).

#### **PPS12: Local Spatial Planning**

Planning guidance emphasises that *“It is essential that the core strategy makes clear spatial choices about where developments should go in broad terms”* (paragraph 4.50).

### **Regional planning framework**

The Appropriate Assessment undertaken for the Government’s Proposed Changes to the South East Plan (July 2008) concluded that, *“...the increased number of dwellings in the districts surrounding this site [the New Forest National Park] and more widely in the South East under the Proposed Changes can only contribute cumulatively to pressure...The only way that development under the Proposed Changes can be delivered, not just in the New Forest and Test Valley districts but elsewhere, without compromising the integrity of the New Forest is by more stringent access management...”* – paragraphs 15.4.9 and 15.4.18

### **Current Local Plan policies covering the New Forest National Park**

The local planning policy framework for the National Park is currently contained within the adopted Local Plans for New Forest District, Salisbury District and Test Valley Borough. All of these Local Plans contain policies to protect the New Forest National Park. The concept of zoning the area for development is not specifically identified in these local plans but the broad spatial approach taken is summarised below.

<b>Plan</b>	<b><i>New Forest District Local Plan First Alteration (Adopted 2005)</i></b>
Broad Spatial Approach	No zoning approach. The four defined villages are the focus for the majority of new development in the New Forest, including residential, employment, new hotels, retail development, indoor recreational facilities and community facilities. All other areas and settlements classed as open countryside for planning policy purposes

<b>Plan</b>	<b><i>Salisbury District Local Plan (Adopted 2003)</i></b>
Broad Spatial Approach	No zoning approach. Residential infilling and redevelopment permitted in 8 New Forest villages (Bohemia, Hamptworth, Landford, Landford Common, Landford Wood, Lover, Nomansland and Redlynch). Small scale business development permitted in Landford, Lover, Nomansland and Redlynch subject to various criteria. Elsewhere business development is restricted to the conversion of existing buildings. Indoor sports and recreation facilities to serve local needs are also permitted within or on the edge of villages in the New Forest provided there are no adverse landscape implications (policy HA8).

<b>Plan</b>	<b><i>Test Valley Borough Local Plan (Adopted 2006)</i></b>
Broad Spatial Approach	No zoning approach. The area of the National Park within Test Valley covers less than 450 hectares and contains less than 500 people. There are no defined National Park settlements in the adopted Local Plan.

## **ANNEX 2: LOCAL ISSUES FOR THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK**

Based on various sources: *Future Matters consultation (New Forest District Council, Changing Lives Partnership, New Forest National Park Authority, 2006)*, *New Forest, New Chapter workshops (National Park Authority, 2007)*

There are a number of particular issues of concern in the New Forest due to its geographical location, numbers of visitors and its special qualities:

- Recreational pressures on the nature conservation value of the National Park  
The New Forest is the smallest National Park with over half of the area designated for its nature conservation value, and a population of 34,677. A visitor survey of the New Forest (by Tourism South East, 2004-05) found that the vast majority of day visitors come from the 3 counties surrounding the National Park (52% from Hampshire, 29% from Dorset and 7% from Wiltshire). There are concerns that recreational activities can have adverse impacts on at least some species of ground nesting birds, and some areas of the National Park are more sensitive to activities than others
- Implications of economic growth within and outside the National Park  
The National Park lies in close proximity to major urban areas, and these are scheduled to have additional growth, as set out in the relevant Regional Spatial Strategies for the South West and South East. Approximately 80,000 new houses and associated development is planned for the South Hampshire sub-region, with approximately 29,000 planned for the Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole conurbation
- concerns regarding large scale built facilities and infrastructure in the National Park
- impact of current recreational pressures – especially in most sensitive areas - and deal with likely future demand (including the impacts of regional house building targets)

### **ANNEX 3: STATUTORY BACKGROUND FOR NATIONAL PARKS**

Section 61 of the Environment Act 1995 establishes the two statutory purposes (and related duty) that relate to all National Parks in England and Wales, namely:

- (a) conserving and enhancing of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park; and
- (b) promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

The Act also confirms that In pursuing the two statutory Park purposes, National Park Authorities, “...*shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park.*” – Section 61(1)

Section 62(2) of the Environment Act 1995 states that if it appears that there is a conflict between the two statutory purposes, greater weight shall be attached to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park (often known as the ‘*Sandford Principle*’). The Act also places a duty on all relevant authorities, including statutory undertakers and local authorities, to have regard to the statutory Park purposes in carrying out their functions.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, ODPM, 2004) states that National Parks, “...*have been confirmed by the Government as having the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should therefore be given great weight in planning policies and development control decisions in these areas.*” – paragraph 21

PPS7 goes onto state that planning policies in National Parks should also, “...*support suitably located and designed development necessary to facilitate the economic and social well-being of these designated areas and their communities....*” – paragraph 21

#### **National Park Management Plans and Local Development Framework Core Strategies**

Under Section 66(1) of the Environment Act 1995 each National Park Authority is required to prepare and publish a National Park Management Plan. The central role of the Management Plan is to guide the delivery of the National Park purposes. The Government’s *National Park Management Plans – Guidance* (Countryside Agency, 2005) states that, “*National Park Management Plans are Plans for National Parks, not just Park Authorities. All those with interests in a National Park should take account of the Management Plan’s vision of the area...The National Park Management Plan is the single most important document for each National Park...it is the over-arching strategic document for the National Park.*”

National Park Authorities are also the sole local planning authorities for their National Parks, with responsibility for producing policies for spatial planning, including minerals and waste, appropriate to the National Park purposes. All planning authorities are required to produce a Local Development Framework outlining the spatial planning strategy for their local area.

## ANNEX 4: APPROACH TAKEN IN OTHER NATIONAL PARKS

There are a number of different approaches to the management of recreational activity and other development in National Parks in England. The tables below set out the different approach taken in a few National Parks.

<b>Peak District National Park</b>	
Local Plan	<i>Peak District Local Plan (Adopted 2001)</i> Zoning represents a combination of landscape character, land use patterns and accessibility. Plan contains 'Recreation Zones', and 'Natural Zones'.
Core Strategy	<i>Peak District Core Strategy (Refined Options January 2009)</i> Currently consulting on 'refined options' including variations and alternatives to the zoning approach (though evidence supports continuation of current approach)

<b>Lake District National Park</b>	
Local Plan	<i>Lake District Local Plan (1998)</i> The scale, distribution and intensity of development is based on a spatially-zoned approach which includes 'quieter areas'. These are served mainly by narrow minor roads, and include relatively remote areas where existing development is generally unobtrusive. The aim being to maintain the character of such areas and ensure that the recreational experience is not eroded, for example by significantly increased levels of traffic and recreational use, visual intrusion, noise and other forms of disturbance.
Core Strategy	<i>Lake District National Park Core Strategy (Preferred Options, May 2008)</i> Preferred option is to adopt a criteria-based policy approach using landscape characterisation assessment to inform decisions on the development of different sport, recreation and leisure-based activities. A settlement hierarchy is set out where development will be focused.

<b>Exmoor National Park</b>	
Local Plan	<i>Exmoor Local Plan (Adopted 2005)</i> Sets out a settlement hierarchy where development will be focused. Additionally there is a 'coastal zone' where there are restrictions on development proposals.

<b>Other English National Parks</b>	
Spatial Strategy	The remaining National Parks in England set out a hierarchy of settlements in their adopted Local Plans and / or Core Strategies, which are / will be the focus for any new development.